

# REWRITE



## The Magazine of Effective Writing

Vol. I No. 4.

APRIL, 1930.

Twenty-five cents

### WHICH STORY IS "EASY"?

There are two sides to almost any technical proposition you wish to name. Recently, for example, I advised writers to write upon the subjects they knew something about. I was not surprised, however, when our friend, Gileen Douglas, in far off British Columbia wrote in to say that was the hardest job he knew. In effect, he said, "The more material I have on hand on a given subject and an intimate knowledge of it, born of a long experience in living with it, the harder that task of writing it up. It's astonishing how easily I can write about things I know very little about."

Elva and I know that that was no idle and egotistic boasting. It is the privilege of a trained reporter that he can take a strange set of facts and quickly arrange them so as to achieve a dramatic effect. And the great reporter can add to this surface skill that even greater one of sensitive emotional understanding, which enables him to interpret a set of facts in such a way that even those persons professionally interested, will remark on the fact that he did a good job. It is always a thrilling sight to see an unusually good reporter walk into a room full of atomic scientists, let us say, and then report the proceedings as if he were an atomic scientist himself.

The point I am making is that the difference between knowing too much and being the calm, detached, competent reporter is largely a matter of emotional perspective. If a person lives all of his life in a small town and never sees the larger values of a city, state or continent, he may feel so intensely about the details of his community, that he cannot view it with detachment. The old gag about going to Paris to write about the Americas one knows, has some basis of reason and practicality behind it. A reporter whose house is burning down, with his wife & family inside, is hardly the man to cover that story.

The fact is that you need to get away far enough from a yarn to be able to see it in a good relationship with any surrounding background material. You should have the close-up and the distant view. Those columnists a practical person likes to read are the ones who can properly evaluate the day-by-day activities, yet at the same time not overlook the long range trends. Most people live for the moment at hand. Our grocer neighbor has customers who come in to buy their luncheon needs at 11 A.M. The good reporter can meet a deadline on a few minutes' notice, but he also sees the relationship of his story to a more distant deadline. Most of us were spectators in the struggle of the Berlin blockade, watching only the outcome each day. But Gen. Clay apparently saw it merely as a tactical device in the overall Russian strategy. So he made his plans accordingly. A reporter or story-teller has to do the same.

There is another important factor to take into account. That is the difference existing between the job of the reporter and the fictional story-teller. The former does not ever have to create his facts. (I have witnessed reporters in action, who did! I have on occasion built a story out of a handful, literally, of actual facts. But about that, please, let us speak in a moment.) The reporter faces a stream of incoming facts. He has to dig them out, but as the river flows toward him he just creates the channel, and sifts the relevant from the irrelevant, the important and dramatic from the trivial.

For the fiction writer on the other hand, the current flows in the directly opposite, and, I think, less easily manageable direction. He must first create the facts before he can give them effective arrangement. His job is therefore, almost twice as difficult. The reporter can be technically competent & emotionally disinterested in his assignment and the results will not be fatal. But suppose the story-teller attempts to handle his material in the same way. There must be understanding and emotional insight as well as mere technical proficiency, or the most obvious story will fall apart and not, as that old familiar saying goes, ring true.

That is why the quality that sets a truly great writer in either field far apart from his competitors is sensitivity. Let us return to that writer of whom we spoke above. The writer who has lived all of his life in one small, perhaps provincial, community. He does not necessarily need to be bound by the harsh or cramped atmosphere of his surroundings. It is almost inevitable that to some, limited extent he will. But that is not entirely necessary. Within one's mind one can live whatever life he chooses. And most of the great artists have had this sensitivity to room for afield. Don't tell me an author capable of weaving such a tapestry as is to be found in "War and Peace" was forced to experience every single bit of it, and then sat down and wrote it literally.

No, that power of adaptability which lets the teller of tales be emotionally identified with all of the characters in his story, is not only a rare gift, but one that every writer should pray for and seek to develop. Too many young and inexperienced writers do not do this. They are content to identify a to place themselves on the side of the Main Character. But how can they fully understand that person, how can they fully develop the basic conflicts in their story, if they fail to visualize the team their hero is playing against? In big league ball every player is supposed to visualize what the next play is going to require of him.

And so we return to the original question. The answer is: the easy stories to write are the ones from our own experience that we've digested. Lincoln Steffens' old stuff, that was new to his readers. Ah, perspective!

REWRITE

Published Monthly by  
Writers' Counsel Service, 50 West Street,  
Ithaca, N.Y.

AMERICA IS William E. Harris WE CAN  
AS GOOD AS Elva Ray Harris HAVE PEACE  
YOU MAKE IT! Editors. LET'S GET IT!

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: 25c. per copy, \$2.00 per  
year in advance anywhere in the world. Copy-  
right, April, 1950. Reproduction without an  
okay from or credit to the editors strictly  
forbidden.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS—we cannot be responsible  
for changes not received in this office ONE  
MONTH in advance of taking effect. Whenever  
possible, please give exact date of change.  
PROMPT RENEWALS help us to serve you better.

Recommend REWRITE to your friends. They'll  
appreciate, and so will you, the great mar-  
ket service we are building up.

"TELL ME: WHAT CAN I DO?"

The question was asked of us this month by a good friend and sincere worker for peace: "In these days of 'H' bombs, of anxiety and insecurity, what can the average citizen do to express his discontent with hot and cold war diplomacy, his faith in a God of peace, and the essential goodness of a positive way of life. Well, there are plenty of effective measures that may be undertaken. All of the practical and un hysterical methods that one would use to combat a local crime wave or a corrupt city or state government.

The first thing is to realize, that there can be no real peace while the little group of wilful imperialists control a government now dictating to more than a quarter of the world. We do not mean for a moment to imply that all goodness is on one side. During an appreciable moment in history, the Russians had excellent cause to mistrust the capitalistic nations. Moreover, they represented a great nation only recently freed from harsh tyranny. And theirs is the dark, secretive, suspicious Asiatic mind. But however that may be, we must start with the assumption which is plainly apparent, that the forces of good and evil everywhere are locked in desperate conflict.

The next most obvious thing each and every one of us can do is to stand for a stronger, a more practical United Nations. The best, the most democratic and efficient world legislature, where a pattern for more humane living and differences of opinion can be expressed and used to develop new ideas, is not half-good enough for us, who wish to live life at a top level. The United Nations must continually be raised to higher standards, so that it will become a truer and fairer assembly place for the family of free nations. There should be no distinctions among friends.

The newer democracies need advice & help. By making our democracy work, and by standing by our beliefs, we can give stimulation to the free democracies. We need to set the example that the world will willingly follow. If our local governments are corrupt, if we allow intolerance and specious equivocation to thrive among us, how can we ask our neighbors to sweep such things from governmental halls at home? Merely by standing by our faith, we are erecting one the best defenses against the crush of totalitarianism and all that we dislike behind its curtains of deceit, aggression and cruelty.

One of the big national weeklies editorialized with surprised pleasure recently over the decision of the town of Winnetka, Illinois, to enjoin Congress to reduce national debt instead of ordering a brand new post office for its main street. There is a practical step for better democracy that everyone can help to duplicate in a lot of unusual ways in his or her community. In another community it might be the solution of an important problem without running to "Uncle Sam" for part of the cost. There are a number of communities that pay their own way & where individual citizens plan for sighted, useful projects for the benefit of all.

As writers, we can do an immense amount of good by dramatizing and giving vital expression to the great power for constructive and positive living of democracy at its best. A letter to the editor sometimes can cause an enormous repercussion; it can clarify public opinion. A well planned article or story is a powerful force for good in the community. Its effect is often felt far beyond any local barriers. The Germans discovered during the war, and the Russians are discovering, a remarkable resiliency, which permits a race to be tortured and bullied, yet continue to dream. You can make millions slaves, but you cannot prevent mysterious crayoned rebellions being scratched on bare walls in witty or angry phrases and nerve-wrecking pictures.

There are many towns and villages all over the United States, which are quietly assimilating "D. F.s." There are others, which have worked out exchanges of citizens, goods and friendly greetings with similar communities in the old world. Reading bulletins about the opportunities for foreign study or the exchange of teachers and students, I am amazed at the amount of mutual understanding and world friendship that is being built up. New ideas, new recognition of common natural difficulties are being transmitted. American technical experts in many fields are doing a great job in showing backward nations their know how. There is no end to the task. There is room for anyone.

The feature writer can find a lifetime of writing in these adventures. He is the poor man's university. He is doing a great thing in thus promoting world understanding showing people it is fun to work together.

## WRITER

### FUNDAMENTALS OF GOOD POETRY

By Elva Ray Harris

#### humor—the part distortion plays

One of the most constant sources of amusement we have is the tendency of children and foreigners to distort the English language. We smile when we hear one child tell another, "It's up against the law to do that." We laugh to hear little Johnny tell Mary, "No, those are not rabbits. They're 'kinny' pigs." And our Billy 'Gee tickled his Daddy while ago by referring to a head-on collision between his own and his little friend's tricycle as a "trash-up".

The foreigners who are also trying to master the idiosyncrasies of our tongue make a similar sort of mistake. While children's errors are largely due to faulty listening or to faulty diction, the foreigners create humor for us by trying to reconcile and carry over their language into ours. The Spanish speaking people leave off their final prepositions, the French leave off many terminal sounds, the Italians add syllables. Whatever they do, children or aliens, the principle is the same: distortion.

It is open, honest distortion which earns the laughs. Not the sly, subtle kind used by swindlers or even some door-to-door salesmen whose claims don't tally with the facts. Amos & Andy have found debasing of words and phrases to be such a profitable source of humor that they have gone on twisting the English language night after night for years.. Fibber McGee and Molly go on a tirade of distorted meanings about once every broadcast.

Cartoonists often distort. I have in mind a drawing in the SAT. EVA. POST. It shows a lady being entertained at tea on what looked like a four poster bed with the back of a given added. And, of course, the gag-line is to the effect that although one might never suspect it, the given could be turned into a bed at night.

Humorous poets, or should I say poets in a humorous mood, also know the value of distortion for communicating ideas. For while some poems seem to be written just to show off a perversity itself, in other poems it plainly can be seen that such distortion is merely a means to an end. Take the pet peeve idea, for example. If you simply state whatever peeve you pick in good prose, it remains a humorless annoyance. But dress it up in a deliberately distorted wordage, or create a twisted image out of it, and you have made it funny.

Ogden Nash is a master at using distortion to punch home wholly undistorted ideas. He rhymes such words as "gammut" and "damut" (i.e., "damn it"), "boredom" and "toredom" (to-ward 'em') and you find yourself laughing in glee, instead of griping at that "perfectly

horrible person who sat next to you at Mrs. So-and-so's dinner party." Nash wrings a sentence's neck, breaks the backs of phrases & does all the mean things to English grammar that poets are advised not to do. But never does he sacrifice clarity. Instead, he gains humor, and it is humor that he desires, and needs, to make his ideas acceptable.

It would seem that one can break literally almost any rule, providing he achieves a clean-cut effect that he intended to. But it often takes a good deal of experience in order to know when a desired result is really being achieved. It would seem also that maybe it might be profitable, in certain cases, to break rules deliberately. Ogden Nash says, "I shall never be a friend of HIM" purposefully being ungrammatical in order to rhyme, & to do it unexpectedly. Most of his unusual rhyming comes about because he is either speaking ungrammatically, thereby giving a fresh turn to a sentence, or he is deliberately & carefully distorting words to make them fit into the sound pattern. An instance of this first device:

"Does a young man go to a picture with a girl he hopes to make a bride off?  
The immovable Dr. Fell is what the only two empty seats are one on each side of."

And Nash supplies illustrations of the second in such rhymes as: "sniffle", "chiffle" (cheerful), "tiffle" (tearful), for example, or "snuffly", "luffly" (lovely). Sometimes he merely misspells a word (a distortion, incidentally, in itself) such as "damut", and "toredom" above, and lets it go at that. In such distortions there is little or no change in the pronunciation. But the spelling helps to carry on the illusion of distortion. In other instances other poets have made use of misspelling. They have spelled words in ways that did not change their pronunciation, as "otion" for ocean, "tuff" for tough.

Nash's line divisions are another distortion. When he writes a short line, followed by a very long line, a line so long that it takes three to six lines of type to print it, he is poking fun at the very form of poetry itself. He is distorting not only spelling, grammar and sound, but also form.

Leonard Seltzer, in "Adventures in Poetry," edited by Ted Malone, gives a good illustration of what can be done with planned & effective distortion. Here is his:

#### I AM A VERY DESCRIPT MAN

I am such a dolent man,  
I artly work, each day;  
My acts are all bacille,  
I've just one things to say.

My nerves are strung, my hair is kempt,  
I'm gusting and I'm span;  
I look with disdain on everyone  
And am a pudent man.

## REWRITE

I travel cognito and make  
A delible impression;  
I overcome a slight chalence  
With grunted self-possession.

My dignation would be great  
If I should digent be;  
I trust that my vagance will bring  
An astrous life for me.

Distortion is like any other device which you may employ in versifying. It is useful in its proper place. But don't let it dominate or get out of hand. It is only good if a reader knows clearly that you are distorting for a purpose and for fun. It should be avoided when it is not perfectly obvious. If it's not obvious and used for a transparently innocent purpose, it can work harm. For it can be misleading. It could even be libelous (See on another page in this issue the story about the N.Y. TIMES misquoting REWRITE.) Take the following example: Carl De Suze on his morning broadcast (SH2, 7:05 A.M.) gave a quote from a letter. It ran something like this: "You cook your husband a nice meal, & serve it by candle light." A few days later he read another letter from someone who had heard the earlier broadcast. In a merry mood the second correspondent suggested: ".Nice women don't cook their husbands. Things will have to get a lot tougher before I cook mine."

This was all well and good because all of the listeners were carefully informed about the first letter. Carl De Suze recalled the circumstances before he pulled the string.. The second correspondent wasn't being libelous because she was clearly and obviously a punster with words. But suppose she had torn a phrase of the first correspondent's ideas out of their context. Suppose she'd charged Mrs. So-and-so with "cooking her husband" & had not reminded the listeners about the remaining part of the sentence. That could be the start of a libel. Her gag might then not be funny. It might make Mrs. So-and-so seem ridiculous and injure her personally or professionally.

A poet should never misrepresent, or suppress, unless he wants a libel suit. But he can find that distortion in its many forms, ranging from simple exaggeration to subtler methods of perverting and debasing words or ideas, may be a useful device. At times distortion may prove the means of representing, of dramatizing and visualizing an absurdity. Much of the dry irony the NEW YORKER employs so effectively to puncture bombast, derives from skillful use of distortion, or by a reverse method, playing the ridiculous solemn and straight. Yes, it requires a real imagination to know when to distort and when not to.

HOSPITALIZED VETERANS' WRITING PROJECT... 919 No. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill., is offering 10 separate contests for hospitalized or recently discharged service men & women. Closes: May 1st. Apply as above.

## A POEM IS STILL GROWING

In the March issue we printed a letter by Julie Hull Wanner in which she gave the initial rough draft of a poem and showed what happened to it as it grew with constructive comments from several critics. We have now received another letter from Julie, stating that, not being satisfied with the poem, she has revised it again. Here is her last draft:

I thought I'd found a dandelion  
By my garden wall  
Yet when I reached to make it mine  
It was no flower at all.

The blossom, winged in sudden flight,  
Sought the nearby oak.  
The goldfinch eyed me out of sight  
And chuckled at his joke.

Since I wasn't at Durham last summer (the poem was brought to birth at the Conference) I could not assist with my forceps. So, here is my belated comment, which was asked for, and promised in the March workshop article.

There is a delightful idea behind this poem. The imagery is enjoyable as well as the joke. But I do not believe the author has as yet written her final draft.

The first stanza in the above version has a smoother reading quality than it had when we printed the supposedly final draft in our March issue. You perhaps remember that then the poem contained an inversion:

A dandelion in the grass  
Beneath the garden wall  
When I reached it, going past,  
Was not a flower at all.

The word "it" referred awkwardly back to "A dandelion", which in the ordinary sequence, should naturally have come after "reached". Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say there was an omission:

(I saw) a dandelion in the grass

But even though this version is smoother, and more grammatical, I don't like it nearly so well. The image is not so convincing. I prefer the picture of someone noticing the dandelion over that of someone actually doing the reaching to pick it. My reasons are that it is mainly children who pick dandelions, but because this is an adult poem, I've the feeling that a grown-up is participating. Most adults remember that sticky yellow paste that covered their hands after picking, and proudly carrying home a bunch of dandelions and are content just to look at them. Also, it is doubtful whether the ordinary person, under ordinary conditions, would get actually close enough to a goldfinch to reach for it before it flew. And if he did, he must be near-sighted to be so fooled.

I fully realize that I am being over pedan-

## REVIEWS

### A SENTENCE WAS TORN FROM ITS CONTEXT

In the N.Y.TIMES Sunday Book Review (February 12th), a columnist for the TIMES, for purposes of humor, reprinted a part of a sentence from a news story in HERBRITE. Not only was this fragment torn from its context, but also the last portion of the sentence—an important qualifying clause was suppressed. The sentence was thus badly distorted.

A prominent lawyer, a HERBRITE subscriber, commented upon this matter as follows:

"There is no doubt that the elision of a portion of an article, which changes the meaning, so as to hold up to ridicule, or derision, is libellous per se. It is, as you know, attributing something to you, which you did not write; it is just as bad as though this paragraph had been made of the whole cloth, and signed with your name or by-line. They should apologize and retract."

We have received a personal apology, in a letter from the columnist. No letter, however, can undo the harm done by publication in this way of a distorted version of a writer's work. The usual remedy is retraction & correction in a subsequent issue, giving equal space and publication to the rectification of the injury done. Appreciating that in the future other writers might suffer an identical injury from this type of editorial license, we have protested vigorously to the TIMES' management.

### LAST MINUTE NEWS

One of our subscribers, Whit Sawyer, conducting a Mass. University Extension course in writing...Doris Marston also teaching in Portsmouth, N. H....HERBRITE, Vol. 1A, is to be microfilmed by University Microfilms, we have been informed...The Writers' Workshop, San Francisco, Cal., Clarence J. Pfaffendorfer, is now "reading" mss. on an opaque screen.

### A FEATURE ARTICLE MARKET

Lewiston JOURNAL Magazine, Faunce Pendexter, Lewiston, Maine. Uses articles on people who have some Maine connection. Uses at least one picture and often more; \$500-\$5,000 words. Pays 10¢ an inch, \$2 for pictures. A famous paper and a prestige market as far as newspapermen are concerned. We are grateful to Doris Marston for this report.

"Winged in sudden flight" is better than "blew with dainty flight" both because of a more accurate imagery and because "winged" naturally offers a hint as to what the blossoms might really be. It is thus a "plant".

So, I'd like to see this promising poem go through another stage of growth. It will be interesting to the author and the UNH group to observe the progress that has been made. Many other writers in the past twelve years have used the Conference as a deadline, and created good work thereby.

(\*A POEM"—, Continued from Page 4) tic in discussing in such detail the physical details of the poem's action background. However, these are the necessary preparatory steps in thinking through an idea until its so crystal clear in one's mind, that there's only one inevitable way of writing it. Bill sometimes spends hours with a student, just asking him apparently unimportant questions about the background of a short story. What kind of a dress did she wear on the day Frances came to visit her? Why little, insignificant details that will not actually appear in the story, but the knowledge of which vitally affect the author's conception of and actual writing of the scenes he does include. It is the same with poetry, even with a poem that is supposed to dramatize a sudden & impromptu insight into and awareness of natural beauty, the unexpected color of everyday living.

So far as the imagery of the poem goes, I believe that the first stanza of the original version is the best.

Dandelions blossomed in the grass  
Beneath the garden wall  
Yet when I neared, to pass,  
They were not dandelions at all.

I do not agree that the poem is better in the singular than in the plural. Dandelions are more often seen in the plural, and so, too, are goldfinches. The image is more natural, and therefore, plausible in the plural. The principles of elimination, and intensification are good ones, but they do not apply in the matter of cutting out all but one goldfinch in a flock of birds that are by nature gregarious. To do that is to violate natural laws under which the subject of this poem lives. And true color and awareness of a flash of beauty, true and poignant artistic effects are never achieved in that way.

There should be a substitution for "garden wall" if possible, simply because its trite. "Neared" is not good, as the author realized apparently, because it appears only in the first version. It is a verb made from an old verb and it lacks the smoothness of some of the manufactured words we rely upon.

I agree that "eyed" in the second stanza, is a better word than "watched" in this case, although again, it is a manufactured word. I believe this because "eyed" helps to give a picture of the bird's beady bright eye better than "watched" does. But "flowered the breeze" should not be stricken out. This is a lovely image and preferable to the fanciful one of the bird in a tree reading a person's mind and chuckling over the mistake he was about to make. Coming at the end of the poem as it does, I don't see how there could be any ambiguity in the word "flowered". In fact, it is the logical and inevitable conclusion to the poem, flashing the reader in his mind's eye back to the first image—the blossoms in the grass. It unifies the poem.

## REWRITE

### OUR NEW CENTRAL MARKET FILE IS GROWING

Our newly organized Central Market File is growing even more rapidly than we had hoped it would. Already, at the end of a month, a list of several hundred markets has developed. Since practically every envelop contains a number of entries, there are in excess of 1,000 classified items, which are instantly available under their respective headings. A number of special files, such as children's magazines, contests, poetry magazines, etc., are in process of formation.

We are clipping practically all of the usual sources. Writers' magazines, the magazines themselves, as they announce openings for the free lance contributor, our own research, that of our many loyal Minute Men & everything else that comes into sight. We're even building a file of world markets. In a few years we aim to have the most complete, accurate and encyclopedic reference market list file on markets available anywhere.

This file has already begun to pay off in a number of ways. In our ECG work with your mss. we have been able to answer numberless questions about markets, to give advice and refer writers to markets within reach where they might reasonably hope to make sales. A sizable amount of the market reportage we're giving you this month is better because the file gave us something to check facts with. Our reportage of markets will steadily gain in last minute accuracy and volume as we increase the file.

Eventually, the Central Market File ought to multiply into literally thousands of entries, because we intend to classify & cross reference until every field of writing gets properly covered. This will mean that within a matter of minutes we can compile lists of specialized markets, such as for fillers, short stories, newspaper verse, etc. All of these will be on file at ECG House, and the readers of REWRITE and our students will be able to benefit from them, as rapidly as we devise methods for making this information, in easily digestible form, available.

You will always play an important part in this file. The more you send us any material you receive from editors, the more we'll be able to cross-check our sources for last minute accuracy; and so, the more authentic information about markets we will be able to send you. Send us your rejection slips, the marginal comments of editors, anything that pertains to markets. We will gladly copy and return these records to you. They will substantiate our slips. Information that is in the actual wording of editors, is irrefutable evidence. It helps us to help writers. To help you.

With your help, we will make this Central Market File, the largest, the best, and the most serviceable for writers anywhere in the world. Remember, it is your file. Fill it.

### BACKGROUNDS OF THE NEWS

An interesting experiment that may have a bearing on the products of writers has been started by the Education & Cultural Relations Division, Office of Public Affairs, Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany. A restoration of the German theater is underway. Projects already introduced are:

- (1) Exchange Program. German & American theater experts are visiting the other's theaters.
- (2) Visiting artists. A wide selection of artists from both countries are being exchanged for mutual inspiration.
- (3) Theater Workshops. University and experimental theaters are being supported. Last July groups from France, Germany and Austria gathered at Erlangen for a conference.
- (4) The U. S. Play Agency is arranging translation of American plays for production. In 4 years more than 70 plays have been handled in this way.
- (5) New theaters have been constructed, and old ones repaired....A good step forward.

Government Magazines. Do you know that an interesting selection of magazines are issued on a subscription basis by the U.S. Government Printing Office, Division of Public Documents, Washington 25, D.C., that are of a helpful nature to writers. AIRMANS GUIDE, ALL HANDS (information bulletin about U. S. Navy), NAVAL AVIATION NEWS, are three which can give you technical and color background. Apply as above for further information.

### A WORD TO THE WISE

In the E.I.DuPont deNemours Co. Magazine, a recent article summarizing the philosophy of the founder's son is interesting & helpful to writers. Here are his points:

- (1) Personal attention to the business.
- (2) Make a product that is needed.
- (3) Know how to make the product.
- (4) Make the product as good or better than the best in competition.
- (5) Never stop improving the product.
- (6) Thrift, economy. No frills.
- (7) Additional investment capital secured & applied when needed.
- (8) Earnings plowed back into the business, and this done heavily.
- (9) Diversify. Make many products, not just one.

Above all, Henry DuPont stressed personal management and responsibility. A writer who follows these precepts in developing a professional integrity in turning out the best product he can, will not fail to achieve an element of success. Talent plus determination and this quality of high competitiveness is the secret, as Boris Marston suggested.

## WRITER

### HOW'S YOUR BATTING AVERAGE?

Here's where members of the WCS Family, and all of their friends take stock of their accomplishments in the sales line. And at the end of every quarter we award small prizes, to encourage more of you to join in friendly competition.

Proof that this column in turn creates an additional chain of sales, was given us this month by a writer. She told how she saw one of her friends and a new market listed. She wrote to her friend for more details. Within a few weeks she had hit this market, and received a nice letter from the editor, asking for more of her ms. That is the method WCS writers use in helping one another.

Please note that we now give addresses of certain magazines. To make this specialized and unique service more valuable, we do not repeat on successive months. So read "How's Your Batting Average?" regularly. And help us to help you by keeping up our research. A monthly report of only 3 personal items not taken from other writers' magazines, by 100 writers would amount to 3,600 items annually. What could you not do with all that information, especially when it is added to a permanent store of thousands of items, that is constantly being edited and pruned of its dead!

Florence Field

Articles: THE MODERN BABY, FARM JOURNAL.

Helen Langworthy

Story: THIS DAY.

Mary Baptiste

Poem: Hartford, Conn. TIMES.

Doris Marston

Articles: COLLECTOR-HOBBYIST, Lewiston JOURNAL, PROGRESSIVE CROCER, Portland TELEGRAM.

Filler: WOMAN'S DAY.

Marjorie McClellan Flint

Short story: Boston POST (First Prize).

Kay Lill

Juvenile Story: STORIES.

Virginia Sievert

Article: OUR LITTLE FRIEND.  
Poems: to the same magazine.

Carrie Esther Hammil

Stories: OUR LITTLE FRIEND, CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES.

Article: THIS DAY, BUILDERS.

Market addresses: MODERN BABY, 424 Madison, NYC 17. FARM JOURNAL, Washington St., Philadelphia, Pa. THIS DAY, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis 18, Mo. COLLECTOR-HOBBYIST, Box 664, Denver, Colo. PROGRESSIVE CROCER.. 161 Sixth Ave., NYC 13. CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES, 1018 So. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.

### BEWARE THOSE AWFUL TIME LAPSES!

It is always poor technique to "tag" your transitions too boldly. Here are some "horrible" examples with my on the spot suggestions as to how the curse could be scratched out of them. I know the author, who is a hard working and eager-to-learn writer will forgive my citing chapter and verse. I have quoted the original and my revision in that order, but just for clarity's sake they are marked individually by an "O" and "R".

(O.) "The next morning a rooster crowed..."  
(R.) "A rooster was crowing when Johnny awoke."

(O.) "About three minutes later Johnny came running into the kitchen."

(R.) "Before his mother could bake a cake—Johnny came running into the kitchen."

(O.) "That afternoon, when Johnny came home from school, his little friends came, too."

(R.) "Come home with me and see the new sand-box," suggested Johnny after school."

My revisions are not literature, goodness knows, but perhaps they will show you what's meant when an editor tells you to get rid of flat statements by the author and substitute action pictures. Or, as in No. 2, by making the flat statement light and humorous, just the kind of a narrative statement a "story-teller" would use, if he were seated in the same room with his eager little listeners a phrase that would entertain or amuse, & yet would seem appropriate. The story-teller and his audience sharing an idea between them. NO, never "tag" your time lapses duly.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Ira A. Hirshman, founder of the NYC radio station WABY (musical programs & very brief commercials) was quoted recently in a READERS' DIGEST from the SRI as saying that "They (the commercial tycoons) have followed the line of least resistance. I feel that worthwhile accomplishments come by following the line of most resistance."

That certainly is often true in writing!

### TWO ITEMS OF INTEREST

Poetry Society of Oklahoma. Just too late for our March issue came the winter Bulletin of the PSO. News of the Winter and also the Spring meeting. And lots of news about many of the Oklahoma poets, of which there surely must be hundreds. Rudolph Hill, Wichita, Okla., is president. The Society sponsors contests and is otherwise active. We often hear from Velma Reynolds Harper, secretary, a member. We are proud to report, of the WCS Family.

A friend has sent us a letter to the SEF, Jan. 21, 1950, in which J.G. Hayes complained at the word repetitions in a Luke Short story. Don't let that happen to you! It's pulp!

## REWRITE

### START WITH YOUR CLIMAX

A useful trick, I have discovered, in doing short little miniature stories is to develop in your mind's eye the situation and the climax around which the story is to turn... And then imagine that it has already happened! So what will the consequences be? This means that instead of building up to a climax, you start in the middle of it and milk it dry.

Let me give you a practical illustration, from a storiette I wrote the other day. One of our friends told us about her experience selling in a sharply competitive field. She said she could not bring herself to fool an innocent customer by hiding the bad feature of the particular model she was selling. So she told the truth. The twist was of course that when she cast her bread on the waters, it came back to her two-fold. Throwing away apparently an opportunity to make an important sale, she reaped more than she stood to gain had she refrained from being honest.

I immediately thought of a child facing a right decision and the conflict in his mind before he made it. It was a ready-made story. All I had to do was to supply the incidents. First, I was going to make it a boy's story, because that would be easier for me. But then I said to myself: "I've done quite a few boy's stories; it would be much better strategy to give the girl readers a story for a change."

My first instinct was to tell the dramatic anecdote just as it was told to me and as I have passed it on now to you. Let the girl walk into the necessity of making the decision in the middle of making her very first sale. (She is earning money for school by a summer job. Success means a lot to her. You would have no trouble in making the reader feel that strongly and sympathize with her. The predicament, the two hard alternatives, etc., etc., would lend themselves to a perfect short story.)

But then I remembered that this wasn't to be a short story but rather a miniature story. My instinctive sense for always tightening the screw one more twist, to beat possible competitors and make a story rejection-proof, made me consider what would happen if Judy had come back to the office. Then the decision would already have been made. By a quick telephone call she could still extricate herself and make the wrong and selfish but perfectly human decision. I began to see her sitting alone in the empty office. Mrs. Dudley, her employer, might return literally any minute now. Would she be furious? A profitable sale thrown out the window, just because a silly little schoolgirl had practiced some Sunday Schoolish principles. "You have to be practical, Judy, in this game, or the other fellow will steal your customer."

Do you see how the conflict and suspense,

vital elements in catching your reader's attention, would begin to percolate immediately? No need to bring the situation to a boil first by gathering the ingredients & setting it on the fire. With a few deft sentences a reader could be led up to the pot and helped to sniff the succulent smells of dramatic material already under high pressure.

This method is a good one for a number of reasons. Most inexperienced story-tellers, I have found, begin their stories on a "flat" plane. It takes them a long time to come to the mounting climb of suspense and interest that peaks a reader's attention, curiosity, and sympathy. If you start right on the upper levels of conflict and climax, you will be much more likely to hit the reader hard, and do it right off. If you pitch into that big scene, you are also much more likely to start with action and conflict.

Do you see how I arranged to start Judy's mind and emotions working immediately on an important and disturbing situation? By doing that you promise the reader something a second character is planted naturally. The reader knows there is going to be a scene—and probably a disagreement. The reader immediately licks his chops in anticipation a promise of action and an emotional decision are in the cards. If you set up a goal, the reader is much more lenient with you. He'll wait patiently, whereas if you start on the uneventful, the reader is more likely to exclaim, "Off with his head; bring on another and better story-teller."

Finally, here is a thought on the strategy of making the most of your material. You tell your story first as a short short; using only the climax, you get an understanding of its potential appeal. You find out in actual performance how it works in relation to a reader. But after you have published it once as a short short story, why not develop it as a longer story? You can switch it, change the characterization and have a short story. Let's make Judy a boy, Tom, who gets his first vacation job. Put another boy into it, who wants to get in there ahead, and take the position away from Tom. You start on the flat this time and build up to a similar (not the same) climax.

It is very easy to scramble up a story so that even you would hardly realize that you were working from the same generic root. You change the background, plan a new climax, & wherever you can use the opposite of everything you employed as detail in the earlier story. Pretty soon you have a brand new and different story. The fact that you have used your plot once will tend to make you tell it better the second time, if you get yourself excited over the artistic opportunity. You will tend also to put more drama & conflict into the beginning portion of the story. You won't begin in such a flatfooted or dull manner. And by telling the same story, in two ways, you learn something, too.

SKETCHES ARE NOT STORIES

Periodically in our reading of mss. there appears a run of "sketches". These are frequently well written, and entertaining, if a reader is interested in problems of writing and the techniques of story-telling. But so far as the editors of commercial magazines, the men and women who buy stories from freelance writers are concerned, sketches don't rate very high, if at all. Editors eternally demand stories. Stories in which "things happen, people react to situations and feel intensely".

A sketch is weak because it is, generally speaking, merely a happening, or a picture. It is related to the incident. It is static in its depiction of the human relations involved. There is not very much of the reaction and chain of Cause and Effect, which in the story leads inevitably to the decisive, resolving show-down. A sketch always, to my mind, is like a spent bullet, or a dud, that goes through the motions, but does not create an explosion when it hits. To say it in another way, the sketch bears the same general resemblance to a story as does a glider to an airplane. One has a self-propelling engine, the other hasn't. And while the difference may seem trivial, it does result in a very different degree of satisfaction for the reader.

Readers are primarily interested in characters and situations, not simply one or the other. They want to be entertained, and entertainment is usually greatest when there is a stir of excitement—intellectual or emotional. You know how the nicest people can turn into temporary savages, when they get an opportunity to watch a man-hunt or a trial in which a man's life is at stake. Readers are insatiable in wishing to identify themselves with a hero. What would I do if I were in a situation like that?

No matter how well written a sketch is, it does not possess that kind of pulse beat. It portrays a situation, a character or a background, but it does not show to any extent, in the same dynamic manner that stories do, what happens as a result of the crashing in space and time of two major forces. One of the principal differences between a story & a sketch is perhaps the greater perspective that a story affords. It seems more closely integrated into the long flow of life. The sketch gives vividly the feeling of a chapter, one phase or interval in the long flow of time, but it does not enable the reader, in his own mind, to fill in what went ahead and what will inevitably follow.

Great story-tellers have the power to re-create a little world of illusion, but also to make us feel that we have always existed in that world, and will continue to even long after the story is finished. That is magic: the ability of a teller of tales to make us believe after an acquaintance lasting only a

few hours or days, that we have known a set of characters all their days. Only the very exceptional sketch can do that, no matter if the impact seems as strong as that of a memorable short story or not.

There's a number of different kinds of fictional sketch. Probably the strongest of all is the character sketch. This is because no stronger appeal exists than the element and interest factor of people. But the raciest, most picturesque character sketch is usually like an artist's conception of a "still-life" material. It does not wholly and completely stir or satisfy the one who considers it.

But again success depends considerably on the ability & sheer skill of the author or artist to make us experience the whole life of the subject, over and beyond the immediate moment or two in which we glimpse him. Consider the portraits of Rembrandt, one of the great character sketchers of all time. I recall certain of his pictures, which use a completely opposite technique. In one there will be complete emphasis on the character. Everything else is blotted out. The effects of a whole life are etched deeply in a worn face, the shape and movements of a body and the clothes it wears. In the other type the character is painted against a background, a static scene, but one implying action. The two types of sketch taken together are suggestive of the techniques a writer needs to use.

The background sketch is one much utilized by amateur writers. They seem to think & believe strongly, that if they create a kind of "street scene" sketch with enough color, noise and realistic confusion, they'll have scored a triumph, and that editors will buy it immediately. This is not the place for me now to discuss fragmentary stories. Enough to point out that most so-called "fragmentary" stories are very carefully organized by the author (who knows exactly what he is doing) so as to prevent them from being merely the episodic splinter type of story, which most editors abhor. It is a fact, however, every critic quickly learns, that many writers in an innocuous way can set down on paper very good facsimiles of familiar backgrounds. All that is to the good. But then the need is to people those backgrounds with characters, & induce them to become involved in important and entertaining problems that will engross the largest possible cross-section of readers.

There are other types of sketch. The atmosphere sketch. Remember the opening scenes of the dramatization of "Main Street"? All the characters upon entering remarked about the heat. The *NEW YORKER* uses a lot of ironie sketches. Ideas are the emphasized angle. These sketches are good to study. But never forget that if you wish to sell stories you must progress beyond mere sketches. Put the motor into your glider. Make it tick!

## REWRITE

### PRIZE CONTESTS STILL OPEN

Julie Ellsworth Ford Foundation, Julien Messner, Inc., 8 West 40th St., NYC 18, offers an annual prize of \$1,250 for a prize-winning juvenile book ms. Entry blanks from the publisher. Closes: May 1, 1950.

The Charles E. Follett Award, 1255 South Wabash Ave., Chicago 3, Ill., is also offered for a children's book. A gold medal and advance royalties and outright award, totalling \$5,000, constitute the prize. It is the hope of Wilcox & Follett Co. that they will find additional publishable mss. This is an annual award, too. Closes: August 1, 1950.

Yale University, apparently looking for the same kind of trouble that plagued the Library of Congress, has taken over the \$1,000 Solingen Prize in Poetry. The University's library with the same jury of poets, but better administrative organization, will award the prize.

Los Angeles Chapter of Chaparral Poets, 5930 Melrose Way, Hollywood 28, Cal., offers \$50 for a sonnet, written in the style originated by Ferdinand Earle. The rhyme scheme is: a-b-b-b-a-a-b, c-c-d-d-c-d. Closes: May 1.

The Anonyme Workshop, G.M.Jackson, clerk of contests, 32 Edgewood Ave., Mill Valley, Cal., offers \$10 and \$5 for original, unpublished miniatures. ("The miniature is a graphic portrayal or dramatic description of any idea, or thing, in verse, and so on a very small, concise scale.") Closes: April 30, 1950.

Practical note: (to publicity chairmen) it will help us a great deal if news items are sent in as far ahead as possible. Our deadline is now not later than the 16th of each month. We should receive last minute bulletins several days before that for effective presentation. Several were received far too late. Also: every month we receive news the date of which has gone by at the time (earliest possible time) we can handle it. There's no sense in our touching it. A contest that closes on April 1st, is no good to us after February 16th, because we can't get it into our March issue, and it will be dead before the April issue reaches anyone but the Lindenburgh Public Library (one of our subscribers, incidentally).

(To Minute Men). Help us to help you. Always send us any written reports or rejection slips containing market information. We will return them. But give us actual quotes from the editors. Then we will be right.

Nash Airflyte, 461 Howard St., Detroit 31, Michigan, is a seasonally published five-a-way magazine. Pays \$5 for each idea used by the "Handy Andy & Helpful Harriet" pages. Also pays \$5 for every humor item used on the "Smiles Along the Road" pages. Rest appears to be staff written. Distributed by Nash local dealers.

### TO WRITE WELL: ALTERNATE

Remember that the analogy of the water in the pitcher applies to writers and writing. You cannot draw out until you have put in. A writer cannot pour forth continuously. It's necessary at intervals to stop and refill—a pitcher and a writer. So, you should plan your work in such a way that you can gather material—fill your pitcher—when you relax from the shore of grinding out copy. Novelists and short story writers often plan the day's work so that they get their "creative" writing done in the morning. Then they take the afternoon to fill up again, or to ready themselves for the work they will be doing, perhaps next week or three months from now. A clever writer can departmentalize himself and really make very efficient use of time. The analogy of the pitcher can be applied in many ways. Fill yourself with technique and then write as creatively as you know how.

### NEWS AND NOTES

The MODERN BABY, Barbara Ann Potters, 424 Madison Ave., NYC 17, uses articles on baby care (prenatal to 18 years), \$600—1,000 word length, and pays \$5 a word. One of our correspondents reports recently selling 4 mss. at \$5 each. "Payment is prompt," she added.

Hawthorne Centennial. The 100th Anniversary of "The Scarlet Letter" is to be set up in lights, according to a news release from Murray Martin, 2 West 46th St., NYC 19. The Committee, headed by Mark Van Doren and many other literary big names and the Mayor of a city rather intimately concerned, Salem, is issuing a pamphlet and organizing other activities calculated to invite a wider interest in a book that is now a classic, though it would doubtless be banned and restricted to adults, were it published today.

Vanity Publishing. Bill recently prophesied to a friend of ours that if she appeared disinterested in a contract for the publication of her book, at a cost of \$1,700 out of her own pocket, the terms would change. And that she would get a considerable insight—a perspective, should we say—on the interest of the publisher. She did! The publisher reaffirmed his fascination in the book, and told her she could take twice as long to pay the installments. But when the author still remained disinterested and asked for the return of her ms., the correspondence suddenly became a one-way one. The publisher hung up, so to speak, and had to be prodded. It's a familiar pattern, both with regard to the vanity publisher and the so-called "critic-agent", the "10% plus 'service fee' boys". They are so optimistic and devoted to helping you until they have cashed your check & found that your ms. won't sell.

Writers would do well to ponder this little anecdote, because it is often difficult to get your ms. back when the editor or agent is 3,000 miles away.

## REWRITES

### BOOKS FOR WRITERS

**EDITOR TO AUTHOR:** The Letters of Maxwell E. Perkins. Ed. John Hall Wheelock. Chas. Scribner's Sons. \$5.75. This is a fascinating, & valuable book for writers. One of the great editors of all time shows his interest, concern for and creative devotion to his writers. The letters to Tom Wolfe alone pay off for the investment of time and money. Perkins worked and lived in his creative guidance of many distinguished authors. I well recall my one chat with him and Tom Wolfe. A **WRITERS' BOOK CLUB** Selection.

**WRITING: ADVICE & DEVICES.** Walter S. Campbell Doubleday & Co. \$3.50. There is a lot of intensive technical and practical inspiration in this book by a writer and teacher of the same. He uses some of his own work and that of other writers to illustrate his points. A **WRITERS' BOOK CLUB** Selection.

**THE WORLD OF FICTION.** Bernard DeVoto. Houghton Mifflin Co. \$3.50. This is a technical, and psychological analysis of the relations between the author of a novel and his reader. It is written by one of the most dreaded (by the writer conferees) members of the staff at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. Benny is unconventional, self-assured and a man of unusual mental capacity. When I worked at Bread Loaf, we considered him salt in the wounds, but we all admitted serious and earnest writers learned more from him than a pair or more of the other staff members. He makes you think for yourself, and clarifies your own beliefs. A **WRITERS' BOOK CLUB** Selection.

**WRITINGS FROM WILLA CATHER'S CAMPUS YEARS..** Ed. James N. Shively. University of Nebraska Press. \$2.75. Miss Cather would probably have objected to this resurrection of youthful indiscretions, but the attempt to throw light upon her beginnings is sincerely done and is intensely interesting to all of Miss Cather's admirers, as well as all beginning writers. Here are gathered biographical material, early writings, and comments by her fellow students and friends. It is exciting reading. A **WRITERS' BOOK CLUB** Selection.

**THE WRITER & PSYCHOANALYSIS.** Dr. Edmund Bergler. Doubleday & Co. \$3.50. One may or may not agree as to the effectiveness of handling of the material in this book. I personally do not like either the general tone or approach to the subject. But the author has psychoanalyzed 36 writers and he has a good deal to give. Writers can learn much regarding themselves and their subconscious, in a word what makes them tick. If they don't become too subjectively self-conscious in the process, this can be good for them. You can be a better writer by knowing how to get as much power as possible from your engine. A **WRITERS' BOOK CLUB** Selection.

Other books received this month will be reviewed in the May issue.

### SOME NEWS AND VIEWS

This month for the first time we have not been able to review all the books sent to us without turning **REWRITES** into a book reviewer's journal. Book editors have become seriously aware that the reviews of **REWRITES** are influenced by advertising, and backed up by a personal and individualized counsel service, sells books. The funds earned by **WRITERS' BOOK CLUB** make possible the other many friendly and helpful projects that **WRITERS' COUNSEL SERVICE** seeks to develop to help you sell more ms. But you can trust us to help you find the special books that will assist you. We frequently advise writers not to buy books. Our first job is to counsel writers. If we do not do this wisely, we destroy our own professional standing.

The **WRITERS' BOOK CLUB** is developing a unique inner group that we at W.C.S. House call the "\$100 Club". They are persons, who have bought more than one hundred dollars worth of books (all types, not just writers' books) from the **WRITERS' BOOK CLUB**. There are half a dozen members at the very least. Several have bought two or three hundred dollars or more of books. They are a bookseller's dream of the perfect human being!

The W.C.S. Circulating Library has been circulating a lot of books this year. (The enrollment is \$2 per year and postage both to and from; no other charge). All of the late new books are included in the library, which enables writers to read them before investigating in them. A service many writers appreciate.

News at W.C.S. House. Someone said: "Trouble with New England is February." It was a hard month this year all right. Billy 'Gee got a bad cold, had an infected ear; Elva borrowed the cold. Heavy snow, rain, icy roads, & incessantly howling winds made us very glad to see the last of it late in—March!

Mr. and Mrs. W. Roderrick Leavitt paid us a visit on their way back to Burlington, Vt. We had a nice chin-wag over afternoon tea. Both doing fine work with the 'teen agers at the Y.M.C.A.

We expect to see a lot of the W.C.S. Family now that spring and summer are coming up. A word of warning, if possible, will give us a chance to shine up the welcome rug. But say "Hello" anyway when you come this way.

**CHRISTIAN TRAILS.** 307 15th St., Huntington, Pa., for 9-16 years, buys only "stirring, 1,000 words, with good interest, action and definite Gospel or Spiritual message. Boy & girl characters preferred. Seasonal stories must be submitted 8 months ahead. Does not buy poems, fillers, jokes, drawings, quizzes, etc. Reports in 30 days, pays on acceptance. Rate varies according to worth & amount of editing necessary. Our thanks to Esther Hammill for this report. Send yours in a FILLION FILE

## WRITER

### CONFlict IS YOUR FRIEND

Conflict is the great leavener, the yeast that raises reader interest in anything you write. If you tell how something happened, a reader is likely to yawn. But if you have a pair of characters reveal how it happened, a reader will prick up his ears, particularly if the two character witnesses disagree. If you go a step further ahead and give a character a motive for disagreeing, you intensify the interest still more.

It should be instinctive with you to make and keep conflict always present in a story and in every phase of its treatment. That's the one sure way of guaranteeing that readers will not throw down the magazine and go over and turn on the television. Whenever I analyze a story, I try to figure out who is opposing whom, and how you generate friction between them. On a railroad the effort is to reduce friction, but in a story we move always in the other direction. The more friction of a natural and pervasive type, which reveals the underlying chain of Cause & Effect, the basic loyalties and jealousies of the characters, the better the reader likes it.

So, you try to imagine your story as being the battleground of two strong forces, like two rivers flowing in opposite directions—but using the same channel. Have you ever in your life stood on a bridge and watched the sea rush into an estuary on an incoming tide? It's an exciting struggle. First, the flood of river water pushes it back, then is in turn brushed aside or pushed back by the rush of a big wave. The force of the latter is dissipated and the volume of river water again resumes control of the channel, only to get challenged. Perhaps for a moment the forces neutralize, then one spins to the right, the other to the left and loosened strength of the two results in a circular whirlpool of eddying, foaming water. A wave is created as an additional rush of water backs up and again is shoved out of the way. Back and forth, a pattern is set up, but is never the same. A subtle movement of the struggle upstream is always occurring. Then high tide is reached, and the ocean is gradually forced to retreat. That is drama, conflict. Water in a frenzy, yet all the time irresistible forces are at play. And if you watch closely enough, you'll be able to spot the limitations of each and just why one force becomes merely resistible and is stopped at a certain point, only two minutes later to sweep on unchecked. It is fascinating interplay, almost human in that skillful, unrelenting struggle to win. I've sometimes watched this conflict for hours. I have no doubt either that observing such an elaborate and intricate struggle has sharpened my wits in building a similar conflict in terms of human beings and scenes. Starting with a simple "Yes", "No" proposition, I dream up all the little qualifying movement forward and back. Alice really wants whatever she wants; she is not going to give it up

### LATE NEWS FROM THE MARKET PLACE

**FAMILY CIRCLE** has been sending free lance writers a mimeographed statement that it is no longer considering me. from free lance reason: buying less and less because it's so departmentalized. Don't waste your time.

**COPY**, Harvey L. Edwards & Sid L. Stobel, 159 So. Beverly Drive, (Suite 333), Beverly Hills, Cal., 90210, is a new little magazine, similar to **DECANE**. A quarterly, its initial issue is dated "April". Primarily interested in short stories, each issue will contain three articles and, "we hope, three pages of poetry (full pages). We intend to publish a group of 5-7 short stories. We are only interested in quality prose, and we cannot at the present time pay for contributions. **COPY** is published by **The Bards**, a Southern California young writers' group. Anyone in this area is invited to attend our weekly Tuesday evening meetings." The Group has no dogmas, but favors imaginative writing, as against a reportage type of prose. "We hope to encourage unknowns with our 'Open Door' policy. If we can provide publishing opportunities for deserving young writers, then we have gained our purpose." (More power to them! We hope they do. Ed.)

**We do not Approve**. From the improbable location of a small Maine community, a combination photo and song contest is being conducted in a series of quickie competitions. The prizes are U. S. Savings Bonds, plus \$4 per copy on all sheet music sold. (The photos may be sold for calendars and other purposes with a resulting 50-50 division of any proceeds.)

The cuts on this award are that the postal authorities might consider it a lottery. (You have to buy 3 copies of the song chosen in each "project". You also have to pay a 25¢ handling charge, if you wish your photo or song returned.) You have to sign your agreement to the rules, thereby in all probability kissing your property good-bye in a case of confusion or misunderstanding. The rules are loosely drawn and although apparently well meaning, do not cover a number of contingencies. Finally, if the firm that is now sponsoring the contest, should find itself with a hit on its hands, it expects to farm it out to a New York or Hollywood publisher. Such divided ownership is never the most practical arrangement for the best interests of a writer. Ditto: contests in the course of which you must buy something.

"**Author's Guide**" (John Wiley & Sons, \$2.) is a revised book designed to aid technical and scientific writers in the preparation of their mss. We've asked for a review copy.

without a struggle. Nor is the opposition, I try then, to build into the scene all possible variations of the "yes", "no" pattern. And I arrange these in a natural consecutive flow of dialogue. Result: a dramatic scene.

## REWRITE

### CAN YOU WRITE A GOOD LEAD?

Good leads are one of the most important, vital factors in writing or selling a story or article. They are the portion of the ms. on which the experienced professional early learns to lavish the most care. It is an art to be able to wrap a whole article or story in one provocative sentence. It is a trick, incidentally, that can be learned, although some folk have the knack of expressing themselves with no difficulty at all in "cute", humorous or dramatic headlines. A gift that resembles the ability of the slogan writer. "The life you save may be your own." "Give from your heart to the Heart Campaign."

Sometimes today a good lead is built into a story or article in a very complicated or intricate way. It may be directly related to the short blurb the editor writes in to the lay-out of the published story or article. Again, there may be a tie-in with a striking picture. One of the provocative leads which Elva and I have seen recently was the start of a SAT. EVE. POST article. The title ran: "Some Cops Have LOVELY legs". A picture you could not pass by did not hurt the merchandising of the piece at all.

In passing, let me add that Elva caught a valuable commentary on this type of article when she buckled down to read it. The author did not live up to his promise for rather more than a third of the first page. The article was about gal cops, but it was in no hurry at all to discuss them or pretty legs for much too long an amount of type. Which is one of the best ways to create reader antagonism. Never promise anything unless you plan to make good. Never let the reader ask questions you don't intend to answer. As in the horse-and-buggy days, put blinders on a reader, so that his mind is occupied solely and exclusively with what you consider to be the line of interest. Don't let him get off on a tangent.

A good lead does two things: (1) it sells the bill of goods neatly and specifically—a tangible, appealing piece of writing that the reader decides for himself he wishes to read. And (2) it piques curiosity. You try to build a line of suspense that guides the reader into the labyrinth until you get him to the point where there is no turning back. And to be truly effective a lead does these things quickly and cleanly. In this article I am mainly concerned with the lead as it's related to the non-fiction article. But everything that is said applies equally to the story.

It is important to have your opening sentence as short and crisp as possible. Make it state a theme in the fewest possible and most efficient words. Make it colorful, too. In search of practical examples, I examined a number of issues of the SAT. EVE. POST. I could not find one that was not long, stodgy and generally dull. In a certain women's

magazine which shall be nameless, I found a lead sentence by a famous woman radio "food commentator". It began with a question, then bumbled on for 11 lines of type and a total of 66 words! It would be a relentless cheerer of vital information, who would go right through that sentence without becoming literally punch-drunk and disengaged over the prospect of reading 1,000 more words or so.

One of the first things every writer needs to learn about writing a good lead is to cut out hanging clauses. Make a simple sentence concise. Phrase it as a question, raise a colorful and dramatic paradox, hit the reader between the eyes with a shocking surprise. A skillful writer will in his time use practically all of the tricks for attracting some reader's attention. He will learn to suit a device to his subject-matter and the probable mood of his audience. But most of all he will learn to be brief and—clear. That old trick of just plunging the reader into some interesting story or topic is always a good one. "It was raining. Hard. Jane..." I bet you would read the next sentence. And that's just where the writer applies the old horse collar. You're hooked.

I picked up a large city newspaper to see what the leads looked like. They were awful. Here are the two lead stories. "Mrs. Alice DeWitt Sander, the former nurse, whose husband, Dr. Hermann N. Sander of Concord, (New Hampshire) is charged with murder in the alleged [!] "mercy" killing of Mrs. Abbie Borotto, his cancer-ridden patient, will testify in her husband's defense, it was learned today." And here's the second: "Left-wingers in the British Labor Party were reported to be rallying today for an early trial of summit with the more moderate leaders of Prime Minister Attlee's government."

Aren't those ducky examples of trite, dull and uninspired gossip-mongering, not news? A professor of journalism could well say that reporting is truly deteriorating. The second "lead" is notable for including a possibly sourcilous, name-calling element of misformation. Other commentators felt that the revolt was being staged by young, unseasoned rank and file in the labor Party. But it is very easy today to jump from "radical" to "left-winger" to "communist". And before you know it you have invoked bitter hatred that is based on unfactual innuendo.

Contrast these leads with another appearing on the same front page. The story on the death of Sir Harry Lauder opened this way: "Sir Harry Lauder, 77, left tonight on his last farewell tour." That is a classic. Its brief, crisp and admirably humorous. It is daring also; to deal with a serious matter in such a light vein. But those who remember Lauder will recall he annually made farewell tours to different corners of the world. The lead thus has a zip and punch to it, the kind of color that promises enjoyable reading.

## REWRITE

### THE QUESTION BOX

We were asked the other day how to prepare the ms. of a book of poems for presentation to an editor. Probably the best way is to have a loose-leaf notebook of an appropriate and convenient size. Then type each poem neatly on a single page, centering it attractively so that it will make an artistic appearance on the page.

Related poems or poems in a sequence might be placed on facing pages. (If you use a layout of that type, it would be best never to type one poem on the back of another. This would require retyping of one of the poems, should a printer work from the ms.) It is a good idea not to include too many poems, or to have too miscellaneous selection. A book that has some unifying plan behind it, is a more appealing ms.

In making up your dummy, so to speak, you might well use some published volume as the model. You will notice that most small brochures and books are printed in some multiple of 4 (16, 32, 48, 96 pages, etc.). This is because a press that prints on two sides of a single sheet of paper (two printings), can be made to do two pages or four at each printing. The larger the flat press, the more pages within certain obvious limitations it can do on a single side of a piece of paper. This is not something that the layman is expected to know much about. But careful planning does help the editor and printer visualize the general size of the book required to publish your book without too much doubling up, or too many blank pages at the ends.

The more you know about printing, the less you are likely to have your leg pulled by a vanity printer. WRITERS' BOOK CLUB sold the other day a book published by a vanity publisher as part of a large order of books about writing. (It was written incidentally, by a middle western critic-agent, and such a tie-up is something of a commentary that is not too flattering.) We could not help seeing the cheap quality of the paper & printing. It was not a professional job. Moreover, the more you plan your book, so that it is simple, practical and easy to read in an office that may use artificial light during working hours, the more favorably inclined, indeed enthusiastic, the editor is likely to be.

Finally, it should be born in mind that a book of verse by an unknown author has very little chance in the ordinary publishing office. Much as the publisher might like to do a certain book, he cannot see any return on his investment. If you have built up a public through membership in clubs, or as successful lecturer and entertainer, you ought certainly to bring that to his attention in a dignified and brief letter accompanying a ms. A book manuscript should always be sent by first class post or prepaid express, and the return costs enclosed in the letter. A

heavy cardboard box, of the type that paper is still frequently sold in, should be used to package your ms. This will be well worth the slight extra mailing expense because of the greater protection it affords. And if a ms. is sent loose or unbound, it makes editorial reading much easier. We at WCS place the cover beside the opened box and then as we read the ms., place the pages face down, in the cover. Then when we have finished it is a simple matter to return the ms. to the bottom of the box again. The pages are never crumpled or mislaid.

### SOME NEWS AND VIEWS

Our good friend and REWRITE subscriber in a recent leaflet concerning the correspondence course in juvenile writing offered for several years now by the CHRISTIAN AUTHORS' GUILD, stated that "Writing for Christian Publications" is the only correspondence course approved by REWRITE.

We would like to amplify that statement by saying that it is our fixed policy never to endorse any product, service or person. We believe that we serve writers better in that way, and also by strict adherence to a policy of never accepting advertising. These rules apply even to our best friends and most loyal supporters, such as Mrs. Edith F. Ostrom. We are glad to say, however, that CHRISTIAN AUTHORS' GUILD works for the best interests of writers. We recommend it highly.

Kansas City POETRY Magazine, Lillian T. Finlay, Box 14, Kansas City 10, Mo., informed a contributor recently: "We pay in cash for poems solicited; books and subscriptions for the others."

New England LIVING, 10 Arlington St., Boston 10, Mass. Thanks to our friendly neighbor at the Red & White Grocery Store, we've seen the news note sent to all member units of this chain. Mrs. Dorothy S. Tomie skipped the March issue entirely. She plans that the April and subsequent issues will be put on sale the 25th of the month preceding the date of issue. The omission of the March issue naturally slows up her need for material a bit. It is hoped, however, that now it will be possible for the magazine to hold to its regular schedule, and so build up readership.

"Juvenile Story Writing". Muriel Fuller, editor at Thomas Nelson & Sons, has sent us some good news. The book by Mabel L. Robinson, conductor of the Juvenile Story Workshop at Columbia University for many years, that has been out of print, is being revised under the title "Writing for the Younger Generation". Nelson will publish it during the year, probably in the summer. A great book, we're told by those who have seen it.

Carrie Esther Hammil has donated a couple of books to the WCS Circulating Library. A Synonym book and a Manual on Dissertations.

## WRITER

### "A. B. C." ALWAYS BE CLEAR!

It is a strange and marvellous phenomenon that writers write to us on slips of scrap-paper. They send us money, often in bills & coin, with no careful accounting as to what it is for. (We recently received \$3 wrapped in a blank sheet of white paper; no address, no name and the envelop had slipped in tripping through an automatic cancellation machine—so the only clue was "Montana".)

Money received in this office can be sent for any one of nearly a dozen different and sundry purposes. We can't carry every item of our correspondence in our heads. And if our filing gets behind, as it sometimes does, a writer may have to wait a considerable time for us to credit money thrown in our general direction to the proper purpose for which it was intended. We carry a "day book" that records every item of income. All items are entered in this as the mail is opened. But we are human, the telephone may ring, Billy may take that moment to roll down stairs. A mistake occasionally creeps in. Much checking is then required to correct the error.

Even more painful for us is the letter on which there is no address, no date, and the signature is "Bill", "Phil" or "Kay". We're good friends with several persons having identical nicknames. It's nice to be familiar; we would not have it any other way, but

### **Diploma Mills**

By FREDERICK J. KELLY

MOST countries maintain academic standards through an authoritative ministry of education. Citizens in such countries find it hard to understand that an academic or professional degree from some fly-by-night university or college in the United States may be little more than a scrap of paper.

This situation is exceedingly regrettable. It is being gradually corrected. But students in foreign countries should keep in mind that the control of education in the United States is the responsibility of the several State governments, rather than of the Federal Government. States in many cases provide for chartering colleges and universities through the same machinery they use for establishing other types of corporations. This procedure provides no adequate guarantee of academic standards. Nor is adequate State supervision of a college or university assured, following incorporation. As a result, an institution here

Dr. KELLY is chief of the Higher Education Division, U. S. Office of Education.

We reprint this short article from the Institute of International Education News Bulletin as a service to writers in search of a source of information that is reliable. The directory costs only a few cents. A course offered by one of the schools or colleges in the list is likely to be reliable. Fact is,

sometimes even our best friends make a mistake in assuming they are the only "Frances" or "Charlie" in our lives. An address would help so much; we could tell at a glance the particular friend we're writing to. Especially annoying is the correspondent who puts his name and address neatly at the end of a two- or three-page letter. When we start our reply, we have to turn and twist, sometimes reverse or even turn upside down a page, in order to find the address. And when there's NO address, it sometimes means a search of half-a-dozen different files just to find the missing address. Or the casual reference to some item of interest or business in previous letters.

The point is that when a correspondent is business-like, he gets better service, more quickly than if he just throws a handful of information at us and expects us to recall, in a flash, all the details of a transaction that occurred perhaps two months earlier. I find I cannot carry even the addresses of a good friend in my head for months at a time. If he prompts me by having it where I can see it immediately, he saves me several minutes in which I can be more personal to him, and the next fellow. Added up over a long day, a repetition of this form of time-wasting can consume an hour or more of time that should much better be spent in talking over practical problems.

Another phase of the same matter, but one that is even more vital, because it affects a writer's relations with editors, is "burying important topics in the middle of paragraphs. I have at times literally combed a letter, trying to find a question that some one has asked me. The mind plays tricks and although I may have photographically memorized the spot in the letter, I often cannot find it later. That is why I usually crayon the margin with a big, black arrow whenever I spot a question. I also methodically cover a letter paragraph by paragraph and sentence by sentence, when writing my answer. I generally try to read each letter twice also before answering it. But even the finest screen will allow some scads to slip through occasionally."

I have devoted a page to this problem because if correspondents let down their hair in our presence, they are likely to it when in the office of an editor. And if you make it hard for an editor to answer a query, or to read your ms., you prejudice him against you. It's good strategy to make your letter as short as possible. To put your ideas and requests in as visual form as possible. So he can't help seeing them; so he will be in a position to answer them quickly, easily.

It is an unfortunate fact that no serious attempt has been made as yet to accredit the schools and colleges offering professional, or technical courses for writers. But it is a fact to be noted well, that the mail-order schools of writing are not included in this list of generally reputable institutions.

#### REWRITE

##### NEWS OF THE WRITERS' BOOK CLUB

I have never seen so many good books about writing. It's a runaway market, bestsellers everywhere. We can't keep up with them.

##### THE MONTH'S SELECTIONS

THE WRITER'S BOOK. Presented by the Authors Guild, edited by Helen Hull. \$4.00. The most all round, serviceable handbook available. A great book, full of "Know How", by almost a half a hundred big name, successful writers. Every serious writer should own it. You'll

EDITOR TO AUTHOR: The Letters of Maxwell E. Perkins. Ed. J. H. Shoolock. \$4.75. A great editor, discoverer of Thomas Wolfe and many others, talks as a friend and mentor to his writers. Exciting reading. Good sense.

THE WORLD OF FICTION. Bernard DeVoto. \$3.50. Written for would be novelists, it is fascinating reading for all writers desiring and entre into big time fiction writing.

WRITING: ADVICE & DEVICES. Walter S. Campbell \$3.50. An interesting and informing book by a writer and popular teacher of writing. It could be made easier reading.

WRITINGS FROM WILLA CATHER'S CAMPUS YEARS. Ed. James H. Shively. \$2.75. A human book, a page out of a great writer's early beginning experiments. The shadow of her later work is clearly seen and also her great spirit.

THE WRITER & PSYCHOANALYSIS. Dr. Edmund Bergler. \$3.50. Very good background for writers, who wish to understand the mechanics of the subconscious. A book to be read carefully and not too subjectively.

BUILDING A CHARACTER. Constantine Stanislawski. Intro. by Joshua Logan. \$3.50. One of the great books of all time for anyone, who would create.

HOW TO WRITE FOR HOMEMAKERS. Lou Richardson & Genevieve Callahan. \$2.00. A much needed, very practical book for the part-time free-lance writing about domestic subjects. Contains notes about many useful booklets, etc.

##### CONTINUED RECOMMENDATIONS

WRITERS ON WRITING. Ed. by Herschel Brickell. \$3. A very practical, all around handbook by members of the UNH Conference staff, including William E. Harris. Good general reference.

HUMAN NATURE OF PLAYWRITING. Samson Raphaelson. \$4.00. Based on a seminar by one of the most popular Broadway light comedy writers.

WHERE TO SELL MAGAZINE ARTICLES. Winston Allard & Emily C. Finn. \$2.00. A new list that is very helpful, and less expensive.

ARTICLE WRITING & MARKETING. Geo. L. Bird. \$5.00. Very practical and detailed. A book every non-fiction writer should read.

THE WRITTEN WORD. Gorham Munson. \$2.95. One of the most stimulating books on writing.

WEBSTER'S NEW COLLEGATE DICTIONARY. \$6. No better dictionary for the price exists.

PLOT DIGEST. Kobold Knight. \$6. This is the best book on Plotting we know about. We are exclusive agents for it and it is proving a real best seller. Sound and practical.

THE WRITERS HANDBOOK. \$4.50. The most reliable market list in book form available. It has 69 articles of great value also.

#### BOOKS OF PERMANENT VALUE

CRAFT OF THE SHORT STORY. Richard Summers. \$5.50. A Realistic, factual book on techniques of writing and being a writer. Summers talks the language of writers. You'll like it.

WRITE THE SHORT SHORT. Warren Elwood. \$3.50  
CHARACTERS MAKE YOUR STORY. \$3.50  
100 DOWNS FOR WRITERS. \$2.95 3 good books.

STORY WRITING. Edith Mirrieles. \$6. One of the all-time best books by a great teacher.

FIRST PRINCIPLES OF VERSE. Robert Hillyer. \$2. A basic book for all poets by a good poet.

THE MATURE MIND. H. A. Overstreet. \$3.00. We are genuinely excited about this book. Try reading it and you will see why. It's great.

WRITING & SELLING SPECIAL FEATURE ARTICLES. Helen Patterson. \$4.50. Perhaps the best of the books on this subject. A product of the Univ. of Wisconsin School of Journalism.

WRITING JUVENILE FICTION. Phyllis A. Whitney \$2.50. A successful author tells how.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WRITING SUCCESS. Ed. J.C. Frederick. \$3.00. Originally published 1934 this book analyzes many writer problems well.

These are only a few of the good books. We will gladly advise you & save you money.

#### DO YOU NEED MS. ENVELOPES?

The best quality at the lowest prices. We try to give you the most for your money. We adjust prices frequently to the cost of replacements.

SMALLEST Sizes (No. 10½ & 11½) (two fold)

25 of each \$ .90 50 of each \$1.65.

SMALL Sizes (6½x9½ & 7x10) (one fold)

25 of each \$1.00 50 of each \$1.80.

LARGE Sizes (9x12 & 10x13) (flat)

15 of each \$1.00 50 of each \$1.90.

All prices plus postage. 30c. is average.